The Music of the Spheres

Frater X

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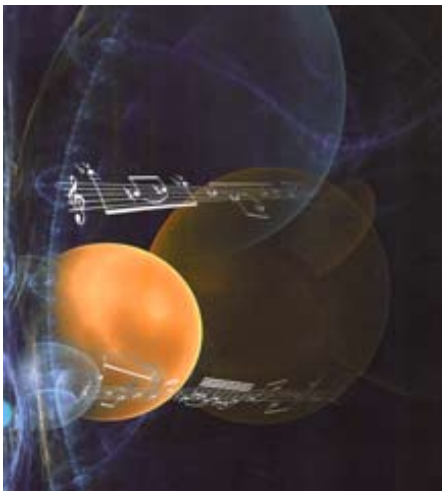
The allusive phrase, "the music of the spheres," has intrigued generation after generation. In this response from the Rosicrucian Forum, *the meaning of the phrase is considered in Pythagorean and Rosicrucian terms.*

Much in past centuries has been written in the poetical and mystical sense with respect to the phrase "the music of the spheres." From the scientific point of view it has been scoffed at. However, the very phrase had its origin in scientific speculation by one whom many historians regard as the "father of science." The phrase is attributed to Pythagoras and is related to his discovery that intervals of the scale had a simple numerical relationship.

In the realm of philosophy, Pythagoras, born on the little island of Samos in the Aegean in the sixth century BCE, is an enigmatic figure. His contemporaries were divided in their opinion of him. However, all were influenced by his thought. Some were profuse in their panegyrics of his sagacity. Others, either being sincere in their diverse conceptions, or seeking to belittle him, were unnecessarily bitter in their criticisms. Even today there is a difference of evaluation of him to be noted. Some modern historians, though not acrimonious in their accounts, will, with reluctance, admit his contributions to both science and philosophy. Others conversely herald him as a genius, as one laying down the foundations of science, as well as influencing all European ethics not directly inherited from the East.

Any intelligent student of the life and work of Pythagoras, at least that account which descends to us today, will proclaim



Music of the Spheres, from the Rosicrucian Archives.

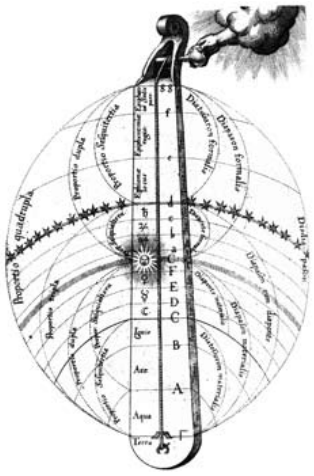
him a most illumined individual. He combined within one person the attributes of a mystic, philosopher, and scientist. Rosicrucians are particularly proud to affirm that he was initiated in the mystery schools of Egypt from whence the Rosicrucian Order sprang. As an initiate and *master*, Pythagoras continued the doctrines which he had learned in Egypt in the great initiatory school which he established at Crotona. The Rosicrucian teachings today are rooted in doctrines which he expounded, even though they have been elaborated upon by the great minds of the Order since that time.

His mystical doctrines concerning the nature of the soul and its relation to the body are an integral part of the mystical and occult teachings generally expounded today. His ethics, his rules of behavior, particularly for the attainment of spiritual consciousness, are often taught by teachers of esotericism without a full recognition of their origin. What may be said to be his scientific conceptions and *discoveries* became the basis for most of his ethical, mystical, and philosophical teachings.

Universe Is Vibratory in Nature

Pythagoras is credited with discovering the mathematical relationship between the various notes in the musical scale. He is said to have measured the lengths of a vibrating string and found that the rate doubled for each octave. It may be that this phenomenon was disclosed to him by the learned Memphite priests of Egypt where he had sojourned and where he was initiated into *the mysteries*. Nevertheless, this knowledge greatly impressed him. He conceived that "things are numbers"—in other words, that each reality, each particular which we discern is vibratory in nature and has its special number or rate of vibrations.

Consequently, if one knows the vibratory rate of the essence or energy of a particular, one will then be able to control its form of expression—just as modern physics is endeavoring to do now. Further, each reality or thing would have a mathematical relationship or place in the great universal scale. Just as there is a harmony between notes in a musical scale, Pythagoras contended that all have their numerical or harmonious relationship in the Cosmos. Here, then, was the first postulation of a universe having an orderly arrangement which made possible an inquiry from an empirical or scientific point of view.



Robert Fludd, *The Divine Monochord,* from the *History of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm*, Volume 1, 1617.

Pythagoras had introduced a theory which in part, insofar as the phenomenon of sound is concerned, was demonstrable. It was a logical premise, therefore, to advance from that into the realm of other natural phenomena. He advocated the idea that if high and low pitches can be brought together in a perfect attunement, it was natural to suppose that all objects can be similarly treated. The theory of opposites or contraries, such as hot and cold, hard and soft, as the primary cause of change in the forms of things, was an idea prevalent in Pythagoras's time. To him harmony meant a balance or blending of these contraries. For a stable reality or universe there would have to be a blending of opposites in proportions which could be numerically expressed. To Pythagoras, number was "the key to the universe." If we learn the number and proportion of all reality, we know the secret of the universe.

Centuries later, another Rosicrucian, known as John Dalton, who was also eminent in science, introduced a similar idea of fixed proportions of the elements in chemistry.

Pythagoras applied his concept to the relative distances of the sun, moon, and stars. He believed that there was a harmony of relationship between them that could be expressed numerically. It was a theory that was also expounded in much more recent times, but somewhat differently. Pythagoras taught that if the sun, moon, and stars really have vibratory rates corresponding to specific octaves in the universal scale, then each must give off vibrations, just as the strings of the lyre give off sounds. In other words, if planets are vibratory, they must propagate waves which can be discerned, just as when one plucks the strings of a musical instrument.

At this junction of his philosophy, Pythagoras was misunderstood by many, or at least misinterpreted. He did not mean that this *music of the spheres*, this harmony of the planetary bodies in motion, can be audible in the physical sense, just as we hear the voice of another. To his credit, we may say that he meant that if we do not hear this music of the spheres, it is because we are not attuned to their vibratory rate—this "hearing" was not to be conceived in the physical or objective

sense. He stated in effect that the human *soul* must be brought into attunement with the higher universal harmony of the cosmic forces before one could hear them. The word, *hear*, must be understood to mean discernment other than auditory perception.

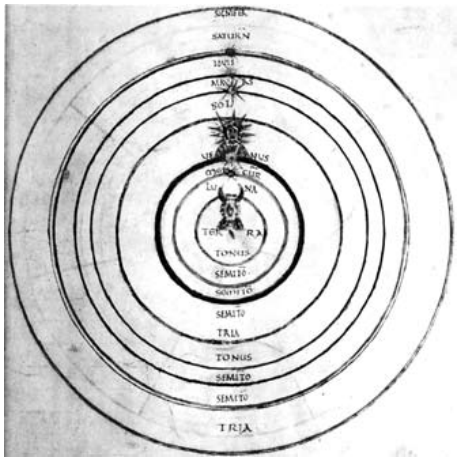
All Is in Continuous Motion

He taught his disciples of Crotona that the greatest happiness is to be found in placing ourselves in harmony—that is, in proper relation to the universal motion of all things. Alcmaeon of Crotona, one of the Pythagoreans, relates, "All divine things, the moon, the sun, the stars, and the whole heavens are in continuous motion." That in itself was a statement which opened the door to a scientific investigation of the unity of all reality. Pythagoras proposed a common property or quality of all things.

To Pythagoras, our thoughts also must be in harmony with natural forces and cosmic principles. Our thoughts can advance or retrogress in the great scale of which everything is a part. Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, probably referring to Pythagoras's ideas, alludes to the harmony of the levels of thought when he says, "Philosophy is the highest music."

Health, too, was regarded as the proper *tuning* of the body. It was affirmed that there must be a consonant of the opposites in the body—that is, such must be of right proportions if health is to be preserved. Disease was held to be "a disproportionate expansion of one or more of the contraries."

Rosicrucians should compare these statements with what we refer to as the *harmonium* of the body in our therapeutic or healing techniques. Though modern-day Rosicrucians go far beyond Pythagoras in the study of the human body and its functions, nevertheless, his idea of harmony of proportion remains with Rosicrucians a basic conception. He said that disease is tyranny. We interpret that to mean that it is a condition



Spherical Conception of the Universe, based on the Ptolemaic system.

which is tyrannical in its domination of all of the body's functions. Health, he said, was "the reign of equal laws." We construe this to mean that health is a concord or agreement of the natural functions of the body.

Mystically, this music of the spheres is the result of a personal attunement with the Cosmic. It is a degree of *Cosmic Consciousness*. The sensations one has of such harmony when in perfect attunement, are not always perceived as an auditory sensation—as something actually heard. They do not always assume the form of exquisite music or a magnificent concord of sound seemingly coming out of the infinite. Such an experience may instead be tactile, as an ecstasy of feeling or a profound peace.

Most certainly, a ringing of the ears, which is distracting and which may occur without any attunement of the consciousness with the infinite, is not to be confused with the mystical harmony to which Pythagoras refers by his term *music of the spheres*. Further, such harmony, when experienced, no matter how realized, whether sound or feeling, is almost always accompanied by great inspiration in the form of mental illumination. The experience should never be construed as a strange sound, having its locus within the ears. Such would most certainly be taking the Pythagorean principle in a wholly literal sense.